Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 07-17-76
Week of April 23, 2007

PRODUCING BIODIESEL AS A COMMUNITY VENTURE

Producing biodiesel as a community venture is a new idea that can be used to offset rising fuel costs to farmers, maximize the value of their canola and increase economic growth.

Now there is a training course available that can help producers and entrepreneurs interested in pursuing the idea.

"Biodiesel is an interesting opportunity, because, unlike other ventures, it is possible for communities to produce it themselves," said Dr. Rex Newkirk, the Director of Feed at the Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI).

"Building a one- or two- or five-million-litre-per-year plant is a starting place for a continuous flow system. For around $1 million, a community can build a plant and get into the industry. It presents some opportunity for rural Saskatchewan that potentially doesn't exist elsewhere."

That opportunity includes the prospect of new markets for locally grown canola, lower fuel costs and local jobs.

"I think one of the advantages of producing biodiesel and developing a small system is that it generates a lot of knowledge in the area, as well as some experience for communities that might want to venture into the industry bit by bit," Newkirk stated.

CIGI has recently launched a training course that is designed to help producers from the ground up, so that they can maximize the value of their canola and grow a product that is suitable for the expanding biodiesel market.

The main objective of the course is to educate farmers and entrepreneurs who are interested in producing biodiesel for community use or for sale as a community venture.

Through a combination of hands-on demonstrations and lectures, the course highlights the advantages of producing biodiesel for on-farm use to offset rising fuel costs. While targeted at producers, others with an interest in biodiesel production and market opportunities will also find the course beneficial.

(more)

Each participant will receive a copy of the textbook *Biodiesel Basics and Beyond: a Comprehensive Guide to Production and Use for the Home and Farm* by William H. Kemp, courtesy of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS).

"Producers may try to build their own systems, but, like everything else, it's a learning process and they will make mistakes," Newkirk noted. "The primary benefit of taking this course is that producers will get all of the information from the outset, and will hopefully be able to avoid some of the pitfalls that can otherwise occur."

Newkirk says that people considering establishing a biodiesel production plant need to be careful to get complete information, even if they are just looking at setting up a smaller-scale version to supply their own farms. He worries that some of the information available on the Internet glosses over important areas like safety and product quality.

"If producers are doing the research themselves, and they are just looking to websites for information, they will realize that some sources try to sell a good story instead of worrying about the safety angle of it. I think safety is pretty high on the [list of priorities]. You certainly don't want to see anyone get hurt."

The CIGI course is a three-day workshop that covers all aspects of the production process, including equipment operation, chemistry, feed stock sources, safety and marketing.

CIGI recently held two biodiesel courses in Saskatchewan, and Newkirk says they will definitely be back if there is enough interest in the province. The course fee is $495, but is eligible for reimbursement through the Canadian Agricultural Skill Service (CASS) program.

More information on the biodiesel production course can be found on the CIGI website at www.cigi.ca, or by calling CIGI Program Co-ordinator Shannon Taylor at (204) 983-6006.

CIGI is a non-profit market development organization dedicated to promoting Canada's field crops in domestic and international markets through educational programming and technical activities. Core funding for CIGI is provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Wheat Board. Additional funds and support are provided by other sectors of the agriculture industry.

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APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN FOR CENTURY FAMILY FARM AWARD

Saskatchewan has witnessed some remarkable contributions from its citizens over its 100-plus-year history – none greater than those of its agricultural producers.

The Century Family Farm Awards, which are now accepting applications for 2007, offer a wonderful opportunity to honour that legacy.

Introduced in 1981, the award is available to families that have farmed the same land continuously for 100 years or more.

This year, the application process has been made easier than ever.

In 2005, the Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan (ISC) and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) first partnered in co-ordinating the awards as part of the province's Centennial celebrations. This year, ISC will manage all aspects of the program itself, which has allowed some procedural streamlining.

"The goal was to make the application process as easy for the families as possible," said Grant Bastedo, the Director of Public Affairs for ISC.

In the past, applicants were required to supply all historical documentation along with their applications. This often involved some detailed researching and combing of family archives, he noted.

Now, however, as the provincial Crown corporation responsible for the administration of land titles, ISC will be able conduct a search of its online database on behalf of all applicants, at no cost to the families.

"We can now do a lot of the legwork for these families if they provide us with the legal land description and their ancestor's name," Bastedo said. "This will make it considerably less difficult for them to apply for this wonderful tribute."

Additional information and application forms for the Century Family Farm Award are available on the ISC website at www.isc.ca/cffa, or by calling toll free 1-866-ASK-ISC1 (1-866-275-4721).

(more)

The deadline for submitting 2007 applications is April 30.

In order for a farming operation to be eligible for a Century Family Farm Award, members of the same family must have farmed the land continuously for 100 years or more. The family must live in Saskatchewan and continue to operate the farm. Applicants are eligible for one award per family.

Recipients have the option of receiving an etched glass figure or an indoor wall plaque free of charge, or a gate sign for an additional fee. They will also receive a copy of the original land grant, and award certificates will be provided to family members chosen by the applicant.

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FARMERS MAY WANT TO DOUBLE-CHECK SEED QUALITY

As farmers across Saskatchewan gear up for another busy planting season, they can take comfort in knowing that ample quality seed exists for 2007.

However, seed experts in the province are raising the caution flag in a couple of areas, reminding growers that they need to remain diligent in sourcing their seed and using the best quality germ available.

Bruce Carriere with Discovery Seed Labs in Saskatoon says that producers using barley seed carried over from the 2005 crop should be particularly careful. He indicated that recent testing on this product is returning some very poor results.

"It went into the bin a little on the tough side, and it was a fairly cold winter last year. As soon as the temperatures started to rise, it started to crack, and it will only germinate once," he said.

As a result, Carriere says that much of the 2005 barley seed, which may have germinated in the mid- to low-90-per-cent range last spring, is only averaging around 30 per cent this year.

This could mean some unpleasant surprises for farmers who take their seed quality for granted.

"Producers who had their seed tested a year or more ago and found it to be satisfactory, may find that as little as 30 per cent of it will come up this season," he said.

Carriere is cautioning all farmers to test their 2005 barley if they plan on using it for seed this crop season. At this point, however, he believes that only 30 to 40 per cent of them have taken this precaution.

Field peas are the other noteworthy seed concern. Because of the hot harvest weather in 2006, many field pea crops dried very quickly, making them more susceptible to cracking and splitting. As a result, the seed may have experienced more than the usual amount of mechanical damage from cleaning and handling.

(more)

Carriere says that some peas germinating in the high-80 to low-90-per-cent range prior to cleaning are only averaging in the low-70-per-cent level afterwards.

"If you're counting on a pre-cleaning germination, and figuring out your seeding rates based on 90 per cent rather than 75, you could be short a few plants in the field," he stated.

Other than these two specific trends, Carriere says most of the seed he has observed so far this crop season appears to be in very good condition. "It's some of the best germinations we've seen in several years."

However, he stressed that these results represent just a broad overview, and testing on an individual basis can often produce quite different outcomes. As such, the importance of producers having their seed tested cannot be overstated.

"All of the seed labs in Saskatchewan do germ testing, and it's often the best money a producer will spend all year," Carriere noted.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) also recommends that farmers have their seed tested at an accredited laboratory prior to planting. These tests will not only assess germination capability, but also the levels of seed-borne diseases and fungi present, as well as the vigour of the seed to respond to less than ideal growing conditions.

SAF suggests that producers visit the Commercial Seed Analysts Association of Canada Inc. website at www.seedanalysts.com for more information about seed testing. Additional material and advice from the department can be obtained from the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca, or by calling the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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STOCK PERSON'S SCHOOL APPEALS TO ENTIRE CATTLE INDUSTRY

School may be heading into the home stretch for young people across Saskatchewan, but it's just gearing up for people involved in the cattle industry.

The annual Stock Person's School will be taking place May 9 at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) on the University of Saskatchewan campus in Saskatoon.

The event provides a great opportunity for pasture riders, beef producers and others who work in the industry to come together and learn from some of the leading experts in the field.

The event is organized by the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan (FACS) and the WCVM. It is sponsored by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, Schering Ploughs pharmaceutical company, Westway Feed Products and *The Western Producer*.

Adele Buettner, the Executive Director of FACS, says it is the seventh year her group has participated in hosting the event, and they always strive to make sure the issues discussed are interesting and topical for those in the industry.

"Every year, we work quite diligently with organizations like the PFRA in putting together an agenda that's timely and addresses issues that people in the business want to hear about," she noted.

"We also base our agendas on questionnaires from the previous year, where we ask participants what they feel is of value and what they want us to focus on next year, because it's really their school."

Buettner says this approach has greatly broadened the appeal of the seminar over the years. "It's grown beyond the pasture riders and the PFRA crowd to include 4-H clubs, cattle feeders, stock growers and even dairy people. There's an incredible amount of information they can all use in their operations," she stated.

"Our audience has also expanded over the course of the last half-dozen years, and we get people attending not only from Saskatchewan, but Manitoba and Alberta as well."

(more)

This year's Stock Person's School will have two primary themes. The morning sessions will be devoted largely to horse health, while the afternoon segments will focus mostly on cattle care.

Among the topics being covered during the day are first aid for ranch horses, horse teeth care, an anthrax update, cattle market forecasts, trends in veterinary care, what to do when antibiotics don't work, and the how and why of administering drugs to animals. Experts from the WCVM, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food will all be on hand to conduct presentations.

Buettner says there's always a lot jam-packed into the session, but the goal of organizers is to give industry stakeholders as much up-to-date information as they possibly can in a single-day workshop.

"It's a great program, very interactive, always plenty of inquiries, and full of terrific presentations," she stated. "It's an opportunity for people to ask questions of leading experts and experienced veterinarians. It's a great exchange of information for all involved."

Attendance at the annual event is usually around 100 people, including many who come back year after year.

Including taxes, registration for the full-day session is $106 per person before May 2, and $137.80 after that date, including a continental breakfast and lunch.

Additional information and registration forms are available from the FACS website at www.facs.sk.ca, or by calling the FACS office at (306) 249-3227.

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